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# A "Best Practice" to Motivate Low Post-Secondary Students: * Direct Cash Rewards

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## Introduction

*"Money is a good incentive for kids to have especially if the don't have any previous motivation,"*

-Jeremiah, 17-

Pay motivates. Paying students to learn motivates, not devaluing but invigorating the learning by providing authentic valued feedback to learners employing their new skills. Resistance to or support of using pay to motivate learning mostly reflects ideology, not pedagogy. But, recreating the learning environment as an earning environment has the weight of research and real classroom practice in its support, particularly from Constructivist pedagogical theory. Behaviour Modification (BMod), direct, incremental rewards for exhibiting desired behaviours, touches every student. And, though "Cash substitute" rewards are less accepted, their success is pervuasive. From substitutes to authentic earnings is a natural leap for today's sophisticated post-secondary students. The question, then, is how can pay be made to motivate would-be students as they navigate through the systemic, recruitment and learning stages of their post-secondary lives?

## Integral Motivation-Systemics

The Constructivist school of pedagogical thought asks that BMod be positive, authentic and direct. Authentic means both that the educational environment not encroach on the "signal" rewards, but that they occur naturally in the learning environment and that the learning environment as nearly as possible mirror the target environment where learned skills would be applied. Upon graduation, students overwhelmingly employ their new skills at work, so mirroring the labour market is pedagogically optimal. To succeed in Japan's education industry, it must also be both institutionally feasible and attractive to students and their families. In search of a "best practice," three practices offer qualities approaching a Constructivist BMod reward system. They are:

- Practica
- Co-op Programs
- Apprenticeships

The practicum approach has much scholastic oversight. This means that the program remains under the control of the educational institution, making it a popular mode for human service industries with professional credentials, such as teaching and nursing. Generally, the result of this oversight is that the practicum environment retains many of the core qualities of the learning environment . The imposition upon the working environment that results from grafting institutional learning structures is repaid by the school. Thus, though the educational institution pays for its students' practical learning, that money goes to the business or institution as restitution. Any additional payment to the student adds to the schools payout as the student's remuneration is added to the workplace's restitution. Furthermore, the pay originates with the student in the form of tuition payments or government subsidies that follow the student, in either case, any pay to the student effectively accrues from the student in the first place. Though this payment is direct, it can hardly be considered authentic. Thus, it is likely to decrease the validity and therefore value of payment as a positive reinforcement system, mitigating the value of the positive reinforcement to

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change behaviour and invigorate skill apprehension. Parents, who, in Japan, bear the primary burden of tuition payments , are also unlikely to view the system as functional, given the extra costs of doubling payouts, even though those funds go to their offspring. So, by Constructivist standards, using a practicum-based system is inauthentic, owing to the imposition of scholastic oversight and imprint upon the practicum working environment.

Co-op programs and apprenticeships are powerful examples of successful workable learn-apply-earn programs. They are in most important ways, the same. The difference is that apprenticeship programs contractually cement the relationship and obligations of the student employee, usually clearly stipulating length of service and rates of pay over the duration of the contract, which typically extends beyond the completion of study. Co-op programs, instead, the student and co-operating business or agency remain discrete entities.

Effectively, throughout the apprenticeship process and afterward, the principal relationship is that of business and employee. The educational institution is an addendum to the employer-employee relationship and the key contractual obligation there is between the employing firm or agency and the educational institution, and the subject of that contract is the employee-student that the educational institution is contracted to train. This sort of arrangement certainly undermines the fluidity of the labour market, but that is a moot point to the question of motivating students and stocking educational institutions with recruits. It is a direct payment scheme and feedback is fully authentic, but the onus is on businesses and the outlay of funds in support of such training asks so much of sponsoring businesses and agencies that apprenticeships are only popular for high skill tasks requiring legal certification. Thus, apprenticeship programs rely on motivating employers to invest in specific employees up front and for a long time period in order to recoup the cost of training their apprentices. It succeeds in all Constructivist expectations, but fails to provide post-secondary educational institutions with much room to grow, because the up front costs to sponsoring employers undermines their motivation to sponsor apprentices.

In co-op programs, both the student and sponsoring business or agency are commodities. Sponsors can discharge a co-op student-employee at their discretion and replace the student quite easily with another. Likewise, students can easily move about between sponsors without finding the content of their learning significantly strained or jeopardized by the peculiarities of the workplace. Skills learned in co-op programs tend toward the practical but also less license oriented. Co-op sponsors are generally secured on fairly equal footing between the sponsoring business or agency and school, with both upholding the relationship fairly equally because a strong relationship is in both their interests as opposed to a contractual obligation. For co-op sponsors themselves, the benefit is generally in getting cheap semi-skilled labour with which they may build an ongoing relationship. Such programs parallel the demands of a Constructivist educational and working environment best of all. Pay is most clearly direct and thee is the added impulse of a student's co-op position being ended by a dissatisfied co-op sponsor. This is a most authentic environment for students to apply their skills and receive both real reward in pay and recognition by the co-op sponsor employer and the normal threat of being "fired." All in all, it is the optimum proven format for a student to apply his or her learning for direct and authentic reward.

There is, though, a less proven approach. This is to create entrepreneurial opportunities for students. This places students into the fast-paced environment of free agency and responsibility for their enterprise. As small business contracts for knowledge-based skills are short in duration and require a higher quantity of communication from the contractee, it is the most Constructivist approach available. Free-agent entrepreneurs receive financial rewards regularly as invoices are filled and new sales initiated and work conducted. In this way, student entrepreneurs not only hit all the Constructivist maxims, but hit them often, intensifying the multitasking and repetitive effects

that reinforce behaviours and support learning.

### Macro-Motivation-Recruitment

The imminent problem in the Japanese school system reflects a growing problem for Japanese society as a whole. The aging of the Japanese population and the strains that that puts on Japanese social structure, health and welfare will only get worse unless it is curtly addressed. Fewer and fewer productive young people will carry and increasing burden of care for elderly Japanese as time goes on. The way that is suggested that this can best be balanced is to increase the value of output for each productive young person. And that requires broader education within the Japanese population.

With an aging population and declining number of births, the ground is slipping from beneath the education industry[iii]. The number of Japanese children available to be students is dropping[iv]. Many schools risk of being undermined by lack of tuition funding and government support that follows students by their numbers[v]. As student numbers go down, by necessity, some schools must become unviable. Damage to an education industry in a state of contraction cannot be estimated.

For schools where students' attendance is mandatory, as is the case for public elementary, junior high, and high schools, a motivating system cannot improve recruitment unless they seek to undermine their private school competition[vi]. All K-12 students will, in any given year, be in school and nowhere else[vii]. For all schools aiming for this K-12 market, then, the size of the pie is fixed and so the market can do no more than be cut differently with rival schools stealing market share from one another[viii]. This is the ultimate in mature markets where there truly is no internal mechanism for further growth and so the competition is substantially as of a commodity.

By contrast, the post-secondary market of universities, colleges and technical institutes, however stagnant the student market seems, actually has potential room to expand for which the only real competition is the labour market and maternity. The post-secondary education market has the ability to poach young Japanese from both of these other two outlets[x]. And, in a perverse "win-win" situation, the value to both motherhood and industry is increased by having their available staff and number of mothers shrink by delaying entry for an arithmetic number of years but raising those people's skill set exponentially, as occurs among motivated post-secondary learners. Upon graduation, people arrive to the respective markets as more mature, adept and skilled mothers and workers. This is, of course, better news for troubled Japanese universities, colleges and technical institutes than greets K-12 schools facing the "baby drought."

With an aging society as has Japan, the shortfall of wages necessary to support the growing population of aged retirees and their medical expenses, there are only a few effective ways to meet that shortfall is to increase:

- The age of retirement (a politically unpopular change which would suffer from the law of diminishing returns as workers would likely opt for early retirement anyhow)
- The number of foreign workers contributing to the Japanese tax system (also politically unpopular in Japan's relatively homogeneous population)
- The amount of Japanese capital exported to underdeveloped countries with an eye to repatriating that money at a later time (politically painless, but hollows out the Japanese economy while putting added pressure on the yen's value as it would tend to appreciate under the influence of this fast money), or,
- The value of Japanese workers' output (which means raising wages though efficiency would rise faster so that Japanese products and industries actually became more competitive even as wages went up, which would be a political plus and a competitive advantage for Japan in the globalized world marketplace)

Surely, the last option appears to be the best for everyone.

The relevance of post-secondary educational institutions is at stake in Japan's aging society. To keep their place, new ways to get, keep and train

students becomes more crucial. It also pressures Japan's funding system as the priorities of its aged citizens both undermines the political expediency of outlays to universities, colleges and technical institutes and asks more from those underfunded youth and educators. The viability of Japan's economy and government are at stake.

Universities and colleges showing greatest decline in enrolment must challenge their recruitment strategies to remain current. For such schools, building cash-based BMod into the curriculum provides them with a competitive advantage over rivals and a bulwark against secondary school graduates migrating to the workforce. Winning over young Japanese who would otherwise work after graduating high school, that is, to recruit students who are attracted to "real life" experiences of authentic work and pay, is best done by enfranchising work and pay in the educational environment and advertising that for recruiting purposes. Both students and their instructors need to apply their know-how in authentic work environments. If making more of Japan's youth into more highly skilled workers makes post-secondary institutions more relevant in its aging society, then building paid work opportunities that relate to students' and their instructors' programs of study is a fundamental step forward. Relevant work must be found for students. This must be the first action of a recruiting school. Getting a university or college or technical institute's studentship must equate to getting a job to attract job-seeking secondary school graduates. Likewise, instructors' skills make them good consultants and researchers. Proving one's educational credentials in real business adds greater relevance to instructors' educational credibility more than merely being published by other academics. Replacing ideology with motivating pedagogy suggests that recreating learning environments into earning environments offers post-secondary institutions a window for securing long-term viability.

### Micro-Motivation-Behaviour Modification

Multitasking reinforces value of learning by accessing and using acquired skills in process and for product. Therefore, according to the Constructivist model of learning, the optimum pedagogy is one which multiplies useful skills used in a useful way toward a constructive end. This is authentic learning toward authentic ends. But, what defines a constructive end for learners? Again, assuming a Constructivist approach, the connection of learning to its end suggests that the learning should be connected with the real ultimate employment of the learned material. That ultimate employment is, for the majority of students and for the Japanese society that underwrites education by subsidizing it with public funds, is productivity in the working world. The learning world best motivates students by most perfectly mirroring the real working world.

How can the learning world most perfectly mirror the real working world? The right mechanism to put pay into the hands of students as it relates to their studies is to employ them directly into the industry into which they are studying to ascend. In fact, this is presently in widespread use in the world in general and Japan in particular. The principal areas of such employment are for school hiatus (summer vacation) jobs. Part-time jobs are also commonplace, though less likely to so directly apply to the area of studies, since overriding concerns are, for the students, a ready source of cash, and for the employers, cheap labour that requires little investment or responsibility to the labourer. Other popular manners of generating a pay-for-study system come from more applied study sources. Co-op programs are growing in importance. Practicum work is generally unpaid, but on occasion does offer financial or fringe benefit rewards of a semi-monetary sort. And, Apprenticeship programs mix periods of regular employment with unpaid study that, nonetheless, makes the connection between the learning and the skill task by both the employing of the skills and the cash reward for demonstrating those skills. These five work-study approaches provide varying amounts of connection between learning and applying the learning, with summer and part-time work being least connected and co-op and apprenticeship programs being the most value-

connected. Pay in practicums would put them among the more value-connected, but few pay students for their efforts.

Certainly, sophisticated human beings can and do make the extended connection between those earning experiences and their learning enterprises, despite the fact that the two are discretely removed from one another. This is true with or without pay. But, what if rewards were less discrete? What if learning and remuneration were more directly applied to real-life work-tasks? If the Japanese population is to educate a larger percentage of its youth population to a higher degree, it stands to reason that the education of the lower end of that spectrum will be less educationally proficient and have less of a history of educational success and less of a family or class history with post-secondary education . This can be expected to be an even more pronounced trend given that less educated people tend to reproduce at relatively higher rates and, therefore, a higher proportion of the overall position will consistently come from the part of the population which has the least reference to success or even entry in learning as a whole and in university, college or technical institute in particular . The challenge, then, is clear. What is less clear, but still probable, is that the current approach to recruitment and education of the children of families without a history of educational success and progress will require a new approach to both their learning environment and motivating them to forego working life for the time that it takes to receive their post-secondary education . Given that the post-secondary path is not so clear for such people without an advanced education tradition and who may have been less successful in previous learning environments, increasingly closely connecting learning with its application is a very workable positive reinforcement scheme to recruit, retain and release said students into the working world with broader and richer commercial skills.

## Conclusion

Thus, as Japanese post-secondary educational institutions fight for survival and relevance in the face of an aging population, new solutions must develop to attract, retain and motivate students. And, those universities and colleges that are most at risk from declining enrolments also those that are most clearly on the "front lines" of this "frecruitment battle." For such schools, building a financial quality into their curricula gives them a competitive advantage, not solely over rival schools, but over the "too quick" entry of secondary school graduates into the workforce. Winning over young Japanese who would otherwise go to work directly after their secondary school graduation, that is, to recruit students who are attracted to "real life" experiences of authentic work and pay is most effectively done by embracing work and pay into the educational environment and advertising that for recruiting purposes. This means that education industry personnel, both students and their instructors, be open to applying their intangible "learning assets" to authentic work environments, with their wholly different accountability sources, as tangible "skill assets." The more sophisticated and mature students of post-secondary institutions are able to appreciate this authenticity where elementary, junior high, and high school students grasp motivations better with pseudo-economic rewards, such as "cash substitutes." If educating more students to make a more highly skilled population makes universities, colleges and technical institutes more relevant in Japan's aging society, then building paid work that relates to programs of study for students and their instructors is a fundamental step forward into greater relevancy by enhancing recruitment, retention and income upon post-secondary graduation. Work that is relevant to the students' area of study needs to be found for them from the very beginning of their post-secondary education. Likewise, instructors' skills make them valuable free-agent consultants and researchers for private, public and non-profit industry. None of these is incompatible with education's missions. Indeed, to remain antiseptic of business and government is to court the very irrelevance that threatens post-secondary education institutions in their efforts to draft students and government subsidies. Replacing ideology with motivating pedagogy suggests that recreating learning environments into earning environments may be the key to post-

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